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Be sensitive to your cross-cultural side – a reflection on course development in Events Management

Adrian Richardson

**UK Centre for Events Management, Carnegie Faculty,
Leeds Metropolitan University**

Introduction

Leeds Metropolitan University (Leeds Met) attracts students from all corners of the world and our graduates follow their careers in many countries, so it is no surprise that we aim to make our awards attractive to international students. There are, however, many other reasons for nurturing within our students a truly internationalist outlook and a genuine multi-cultural sensitivity. They should be able to operate more effectively in global organisations or to respond sympathetically to the challenges of a multi-cultural society, for example. When the Leslie Silver International Faculty was formed in 2004 it became a matter of University policy (Killick, 2006) to promote cross-cultural capability and global perspectives as key themes in the review and development of courses. This reflection looks back upon that approach for a range of courses in Events Management and comments on its future role.

Events Management and the International Faculty

The Events Management programme of courses is now in its 15th year at Leeds Met. It has grown from some 30 students in 1996–97 to over a thousand studying our courses in the 2010–11 academic year. The UK Centre for Events Management (UKCEM) is now a major player in this relatively young academic discipline, as evidenced by its hosting of the fourth Global Events Conference in July 2010. When

the staff associated with these courses moved to join the new International Faculty in 2004 the core undergraduate courses were due for their second major review and a suite of new top-ups were being planned; postgraduate study was also well underway. During the period 2008–10 the Centre conducted reviews and approvals for a total of 13 courses. During this process, we were required to complete what could be described as a 'statement of conformity' to the concepts of cross-cultural capability and global perspectives (Killick, 2006).

I led the Programme Development Team at the time and did not find this the most welcome additional task to go alongside the preparation of more traditional documents such as critical appraisals, programme specifications, module definitions and resources documents. But we planned the work in three areas:

- a) a survey of the publications and experiences of the teaching staff
- b) a review of teaching materials, sources, case studies and methods
- c) an assessment of the nature of our student body.

Each was explored to identify examples of positive internationalist outlooks to challenge students' perceptions of the world and their subject. The findings were then summarised in a statement that described aspects of the Events programme under review in response to a series of standardised questions (Richardson, 2009).

Cross-cultural capability and global perspectives

The results were something of a surprise. It turned out that we didn't need to change our approach to Events Management education radically: we had the staff, the materials and the learning outcomes to deliver international perspectives on our subject. It was particularly helpful that our curriculum was firmly based around a blueprint called the Events Management Body of Knowledge (Silvers et al, 2006) which was the result of a truly international collaborative endeavour. We were also fortunate that the UKCEM staff were able to demonstrate a great breadth of knowledge and practical experience in the subject that they had practised in many

regions of the world.

Some examples from my own modules that address event law and risk will illustrate our findings (in the original document each question actually elicited responses from a range of modules at all levels):

How does the programme make the students aware of the global impacts of the subject area?

- In Level 3 and Masters Risk Management workshops we consider international events cases such as The Hajj pilgrimage (Saudi Arabia), the Roskilde and Ellis Park disasters (Denmark and South Africa respectively), the Olympic and Commonwealth Games etc to highlight national and cultural differences in response to risk management failure.

How does the programme enable students to develop wider perspectives and respond positively to difference?

- Cultural theory is used in L3 Event Risk Management and modules at other levels to explore different cultural understandings of risk as applied to events and other experiences.

How does the programme encourage students to be curious beyond own cultural boundaries?

- Our teaching in L3 and Masters Risk Management modules, for example, challenges students' preconceptions and stereotypes of risk behaviour and risk tolerance to be receptive to other cultural viewpoints.

In what ways are students helped to examine their own values, compare them with the values of others and engage in respectful debate where differences occur?

- The differing ethical groundings of different legal systems are reviewed in L2 Events Law and Administration.

(Adapted from Richardson, 2009)

However, it was not unexpected to find that our undergraduate student body was rather too homogeneous to sustain our claim to be truly multicultural: a large portion of our new undergraduate students are female UK students. The undergraduate cohorts show a low uptake by non-UK students but the postgraduate groups are much more heterogeneous.

On further analysis of their recent activities the undergraduate students were found to be more open to internationalist ideas than their origins might imply. Events Management students at Leeds Met have a good record of being willing to engage in overseas student exchanges, international volunteering activities and placements abroad. Caruana and Spurling (2007) maintain that the full process of internationalisation is not just about making courses accessible for international students but making them a vehicle for developing these capabilities in all students, which is what we are now striving to achieve.

UKCEM was one of the first subject groups to undertake an analysis of cross-cultural capability and global perspectives and the resulting document (Richardson, 2009) demonstrated positive attitudes of staff and students and the presence of extensive resources of experience and support materials to enhance our teaching and learning activities. Our document was used to advise and inform other groups going through the same processes of review and approval so, although the International Faculty no longer exists as a separate academic unit, its ethos persists in the locations to which

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its staff and courses have now travelled following recent realignments (Events Management now resides in the Carnegie Faculty).

We continue to address some of the challenges outlined by Brookes and Beckett (2010) in their analysis of Hospitality Management courses. Our staff engagement with international conferences and the adoption of some of our courses to be delivered in partner institutions in Europe and India will serve as vehicles for such development, but more clearly can be done. For example, being able to lead effective learning in this sense may require some further work. As Laughton and Otterwill (2000) point out, the development of pedagogy is just as important in achieving these aims, so further development of teaching staff to enable them to get the best out of their materials and experience may be necessary.

While I can identify many positive outcomes to this process I feel a need to place in perspective the concepts of cross-cultural capability and global perspectives along with the process we used to explore them. Course design and development involve striking a balance between the academic and the applied, or the theory and the practice, or skills and capabilities. As a Chartered Member of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, I came into Events Management teaching with a wish to promote health and safety in a highly vocational discipline, so I can make a case for other fields to be just as important in many of Leeds Metropolitan's courses as cross-cultural capability and global perspectives; some of them, perhaps, even more so. For example: capability in health and safety, sustainability, corporate social responsibility, ethical practice, etc might also be regarded as important.

Conclusion

On preparing this reflection I have found that the process of reviewing our work in Events Management education has yielded some very positive examples of practice and materials that promote a real internationalist outlook. To this end the requirement to make an explicit statement as part of the procedure for Periodic Review of Courses has been very productive. However, I would repeat my view that

our graduates – the future movers and shakers in their societies – should leave us equipped with a full box of tools alongside their subject knowledge and skills. So if we accept that “we are all internationalists now”, perhaps our future course reviews and approvals can consider a document reflecting how we approach *all* these issues in our research, teaching, learning and practice.

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